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EXTENT TO WHICH NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

Introduction

1. Africa is a group of countries forming the stage whereon are acted out major contradictions in which all socio-economic concepts take on the form of an obstacle course which confounds anyone wishing to draw up a typology of problems that must be solved before being able, finally, to discuss development. Be that as it may, the most appropriate approach will be the one which, through an essentially scientific analysis, best takes into account the multiplicity of phenomena in the modern geopolitical arena, characterized as it is by well-known political and religious ideologies. It is apparent, therefore, that the definition of clear national strategies for development is a function of the sovereignty of governments, and hence makes the charting of new courses for self-centred and self-sustained development strategies based on each country's "own forces" a delicate undertaking. Moreover, the continuing situation of growing impoverishment gives grounds for wondering about the size and true compass of each African country's "own forces", and about the disparity between the intentions spelt out in development strategies and plans and the results of activities undertaken with a view to development.

2. Women in Africa constitute about 50.31 percent of the total population and 22.37 percent of the economically active population, while 42.5 percent of economically active women are to be found in the agriculture sector. During the United Nations Development Decade the United Nations and particularly the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW), recognizing that the effort to involve women in development activities necessarily (in the light of the socio-economic and political conditions Africa has to contend with) entails the definition of clear development strategies which take into account the contribution of women to socio-economic life, the establishment of structures and mechanisms for promoting and following up this contribution of women, and, finally, the release and mobilization of financial resources and the training of the human resources required. ATRCW, then, made considerable efforts to assist member States in establishing or strengthening national mechanisms for women, and in designing projects and programmes whose medium-term objective was to increase the contribution of women to national development efforts. Much indeed still remains to be done, but the essential thing was to make a start, and that is the note of hope for tomorrow!

3. If, after 10 years of activities by governments and the United Nations for the advancement of women in the world and in Africa, African national plans take but little account of women's contribution to development, this is first of all, among other reasons, because the sectors in which substantial numbers of women are active, namely, food-crop agriculture and the marginalized jobs sector (small-scale retail trade, services and crafts), have not hitherto been recognized as areas of any importance either for the planning exercise or, it goes without saying, for the results of that planning.

4. Thus, out of 51 independent States, barely 10 openly pay attention in their national development plans to women and their contribution to development. The unfortunately still prevailing invisibility of women in national development plans is the result of numerous obstacles which may be grouped for convenience of analysis into two types:

I. Psycho-sociological obstacles;
II. Structural and organizational obstacles.

I. Psycho-sociological obstacles

5. These are many and varied, and are just as important as the obstacles that can be identified in other areas. In African countries as a whole indeed, the decision-makers and actors in development planning are men who give no clear encouragement to the reasoned consideration of women's contribution to development activities. When planners are asked about the contribution of women, the kind of answer that can generally be expected is "why specific measures for women? Development is for the national community as a whole", or "women are already integrated in development"! Be that as it may, most of the replies received testify to a "misperception" of women and their role in development, which it has still not been possible to bring about even after 30 years of trying. There is a failure to put human resources, especially women, in touch with the problems which hamper development, for example the "economic crisis", the deterioration in terms of trade, and so on, as if the monetary problems to which these give rise did not have to do, in terms of their causes and their effects, with men and women performing specific functions within the existing economic structures. Disasters, which as is known are not due solely to the vagaries of the weather, but are something to which men and women contribute have a share in, as regards both the underlying causes and the solutions to be brought to bear, are too rarely considered from the standpoint of women's contribution.

6. Set against this, there are women and the perception they have, or can have, of the role they should be called upon to play in development. In addition to the place commonly assigned to women in line with their image in tradition and religion, consideration should be given to the political functions assigned to them in mobilizing the population behind the national party's policy objectives, functions which may explain the discrepancies between the objectives proclaimed and the effects actually produced. It must be admitted that women are more concerned about the image men may have of them and their actions in the context of the activities undertaken. The fact, moreover, that women have still not succeeded in crystallizing the perception they have of their own contribution in terms of a programme or quantifiable data does little, it must be said, to advance their cause in the eyes of national planning institutions.

7. National planning decision-makers also cite the lack of solidarity among women. These are ideas that apply with equal force to the male community, which is more inclined to emphasize how members of the human race should, after all, think and behave. It happens that the women who for the time being are in a position to act within the existing structures are vulnerable to this type of argument, because of their still limited numbers in socio-economic decision-making circles, and that they are easy to manipulate for the same reasons.

8. Moreover, even though African women leaders have made and are making great efforts to achieve visibility in the development field, the political dimension of their effort outweighs the highly technical dimension required for development purposes. There has to be an additional input of effort and of vigilance on the

part of national mechanisms and their officials to keep within appropriate, optimum limits with a view to promoting the contribution of women to the accumulation and consolidation of the wealth of nations.

II. Structural and organizational obstacles

9. These may manifest themselves in the difficulty of choosing national development policies, as well as in the mobilization and action mechanisms envisaged by African countries. Over the decade 1975-1985, countries established national mechanisms for the advancement of women. These mechanisms differ in scope from country to country, but also in their action within one and the same country. In many cases, indeed, these mechanisms are not having the success they should in establishing organic links with national development planning services. However, some few examples may be noted which merit close study, in terms both of their structure and of the programmes and projects they have implemented. In general, projects aimed at women related to so-called traditional women's activities - dressmaking, pottery, basket making: if agricultural production projects are started up, they are very often taken over by men as soon as they become productive, because the women come up against problems of management and administration. Moreover, projects for women are very often social welfare projects (family health, socio-cultural activities), and thus not openly and directly oriented towards measurable social production.

10. Thus, on the basis of such data, should not national mechanisms set as their priority task the monitoring of the socio-economic and political system, at the design, implementation and resource allocation phases, so as to ensure the visibility of women as well as men at all stages of development activities? Looking at the food-crop agriculture sector, which occupies an important place in African economies that is being increasingly recognized, and also includes the largest number of women, it is apparent that the obstacles have been essentially the absence of a national policy in the proper sense, the absence of clear and effective roles for women, the difficulty women face in obtaining access to financial and technological resources, and the absence of organized markets for the forms of production in which women are involved.

11. Apart from the established fact that access to the monetary economy is easier for men through cash crops, women have to face the well-known obstacles of access to land, credit and modern means of production, and difficulty of access to the knowledge and know-how dispensed in the areas of agriculture-related training and education. The invisibility which characterizes women's participation in agricultural production naturally extends also to their contribution to stockraising and the processing of livestock products, particularly milk; this is reflected in women's inability to join dairy co-operatives where they exist, and their inability likewise to seek assistance, or to aspire to undergo training and acquire specialized skills.

III. Towards solutions for tomorrow

12. In order to make it possible to measure the participation of women in national development plans, national development strategies need first of all to define clearly the status of women and the roles that can be assigned to them. This comes down, in a sense, to defining:

- clearly structured production systems;
- appropriate consumption patterns consistent with established national priorities;
- a totally unprejudiced allocation of national resources to basic production sectors.

13. There is also a need to draw up and apply a deliberate policy of action aimed at involving women in national planning exercises.

14. Women's visibility in national development plans must be a priority for women themselves, especially for women in national mechanisms, for in the final analysis the struggle for the advancement of women, while it must count on the involvement of men, must be waged by women themselves.